

Open Research Online

The Open University's repository of research publications
and other research outputs

Supporting the teaching of pronunciation in the language curriculum

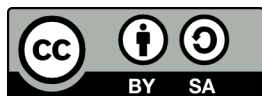
Other

How to cite:

Alvarez, Inma., Fuertes Gutiérrez, Mara. and Bárkányi, Zsuzsanna. (2020) Supporting the teaching of pronunciation in the language curriculum. in Ubachs, George (ed.) The Envisioning Report for Empowering Universities (4th Edition). Maastricht, The Netherlands, European Association of Distance Teaching Universities, pp.12-14.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 2020 The Authors



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>

Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

https://empower.eadtu.eu/images/report/The_Envisioning_Report_for_EMPOWERING_Universities_4th_Edition_2020.pdf

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

oro.open.ac.uk

Inma Álvarez, Zsuzsanna Bárkányi and Mara Fuertes Gutiérrez

The Open University, The United Kingdom

Innovative impact

At the School of Languages at the Open University (OU) in the United Kingdom we have developed a set of Open Educational Resources (OERs) for the teaching of pronunciation to English-speaking learners of Spanish. The main aim was to enhance Spanish language teachers' professional competences in phonetics and phonology. We followed an approach based on a contrastive linguistics model facilitating the comparison between English and Spanish sounds in different phonetic contexts as well as developing areas not usually covered in pronunciation courses. Another innovative aspect of the approach is that it encourages in-service teachers of any language to create, curate and share their professional knowledge online, as well as to establish a supportive dialogue around specific areas of expertise. Our materials are available at OpenLearnCreate: <https://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/course/view.php?id=410>

[9](#). Further materials can be designed using this platform.

These resources have been possible thanks to the funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) for the *Language Acts and Worldmaking* project. Grant [AH/N004655/1]. (<https://languageacts.org/>).

Supporting the teaching of pronunciation in the language curriculum

Introduction

The teaching of pronunciation in the language classroom has traditionally been addressed in a superficial manner, as different methods and approaches have tended to emphasize aspects related to language learning and teaching such as grammar, vocabulary or communication, making them the focus of teachers' and learners' attention in lessons. Furthermore, the benefits of teaching pronunciation tend to be overlooked in the learning materials and teacher training programmes (Mellado, 2012). However, recent studies have demonstrated the benefits of explicit instruction when it comes to acquire the pronunciation at all levels (Rao, 2019). In addition, the scale of descriptors developed in the original version of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment* (Council of Europe, 2001) — one of the most influential documents in the area of language learning and teaching in recent years — implicitly put emphasis on achieving a native speaker norm. This vindicated an approach to teaching pronunciation based on correction rather than intelligibility, making its treatment in the classroom challenging for teachers and frustrating for learners. Admittedly, the companion volume to this publication (Council of Europe, 2018) acknowledges that the descriptor corresponding to Phonological Control was the least successful scale and a whole new set has been developed, which will hopefully have a positive impact on teaching pronunciation in the next few years.

Developing oral skills

Tackling sounds is key to easing the flow of learners' speech and to recognising sound patterns and word combinations when listening. The development of oral skills encourages learners to go beyond the familiar range of sounds with which they may feel comfortable. When learning a language, some sounds may be identical to the sounds of other languages that the learner can already speak, others are similar, yet other sounds may be completely new.

The acquisition of pronunciation is influenced by several factors, one of the most prominent being transfer, i.e. the influence of the languages already known by the learner into the perception and production of the language they are currently learning. This transfer can be positive, when a sound is familiar, or negative, if the given sound does not exist in one of the languages. In addition, some sounds can exist in both languages, but their distribution or possible combinations can be different in each of them.

References

Real Academia Española y Asociación de las academias de la lengua española (2011). *Nueva Gramática de la lengua española: Fonética y Fonología*. Madrid: Espasa libros.

[Centro Virtual Cervantes \(2005\). Plan curricular del Instituto Cervantes. Pronunciación.](#)

Council of Europe (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge: UP.

Council of Europe (2018). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment. Companion volume with new descriptors*. Strasbourg.

Gil Fernández, J. (Ed.) (2012). *Aproximación a la enseñanza de la pronunciación en el aula de español*. Madrid: Edinumen.

Jakson, E. and Rubio, A. (1969). *Spanish made simple*. London: Heinemann.

Lado, R. (1957). *Linguistics across cultures: Applied linguistics for language teachers*. Michigan: UP.

Mellado, A. (2012). "La pronunciación: un objetivo crucial para la enseñanza/aprendizaje de la competencia comunicativa." In Gil Fernández (Ed.) *Aproximación a la enseñanza de la pronunciación en el aula de español*. Madrid: Edinumen, 11-41.

Poch Olivé, D. (2004). "[La pronunciación en la enseñanza del español como lengua extranjera](#)." *redELE* 1, s.p.

Teaching Spanish pronunciation

In the past few years, several proposals have been developed to support Spanish language teachers when undertaking this task (Gil Fernández, ed., 2012; Rao, ed., 2019), although there is little evidence of these proposals being implemented in the classroom. In the field of Spanish language teaching, the persistence of certain myths related to the teaching of pronunciation has contributed to this content being covered lightly and even incidentally. Traditionally, there is the idea of Spanish being a phonetic language whose pronunciation does not need to be taught (Jakson and Rubio, 1969 cited by Poch Olivé, 2004). Moreover, although language teachers are not expected to be phoneticians, their knowledge of stress, rhythm, articulation of sounds and intonation, and the role these elements play in speaking and listening seems to be very limited (Poch Olivé, 2004), which leads them to neglect crucial support of learning to articulate comprehensible speech patterns. As a consequence, at all levels of education, pronunciation tends not to receive much attention in post-beginners' courses, once the phonetics of sounds and basic intonation patterns at a descriptive level have been covered.

Teaching pronunciation at a distance

After more than 20 years of language teaching at a distance at the Open University (OU) in the United Kingdom, we conducted a thorough curriculum review that gave us the opportunity to rethink the teaching of oral skills with a focus on pronunciation. While some pronunciation activities had been previously introduced in our modules, this time we decided to design an online graded pronunciation guide for the Spanish degree qualification. This guide was a unique and ambitious resource to be used from beginners to advanced modules. The idea of the guide was to produce a coherent interactive resource that included detailed explanations on sounds, stress and intonation, a glossary, interactive exercises, practical tips for English-speaking learners and an introduction to the varieties of Spanish.

After a detailed examination of the pedagogical literature on the topic (mentioned above) as well as the inventory produced by the Centro Virtual Cervantes (2005), and some resources from the Real Academia Española y Asociación de Reales Academias de la Lengua (2011), it became clear that the existing guidance was very comprehensive in some areas, even to an excessive level of detail, while others were thinly developed. For instance, there was very little on the richness of World Spanish, an approach that ensures an understanding of the multiple spoken varieties of this language around the world.

At beginners' level the general advice in language materials is to simply give information about the dialectal variations of the Spanish sounds. It is not until an intermediate level that it is suggested to include samples of different geographical accents from Spain and Spanish America. However, this contradicted the evidence we had acquired at the OU from testing exposure to sounds and linguistic varieties. Therefore, the guide we created for our programme combines the advice from the few available sources with our practice-

Rao, R. (Ed.). (2019). *Key Issues in the Teaching of Spanish Pronunciation*. London: Routledge,
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315666839>

based knowledge on how language learners learn best listening and speaking in Spanish. The guide also incorporates much needed interactive activities where distance learners could listen to examples and compare them with their own spoken utterances.

Open Educational Resources as a source of professional development

Any curricular innovation needs to consider the development of teachers. Via the monitoring of the feedback provided in speaking assignments, we have evidence that language tutors lack confidence on how to advise on the aural aspects of the learning, particularly, on how to tackle systematic pronunciation errors. For this reason, and to complement the recently-created pronunciation guide, we have developed a course aimed at teachers of Spanish working in the United Kingdom who wish to extend their theoretical knowledge of teaching Spanish pronunciation, offering ideas and practical skills that can be used in the classroom.

Different theories and approaches on the role of the first language (L1) in the learning and acquisition of a second language (L2) coexist at present in the field of language learning. It seems clear, though, that the L1 and other languages already spoken by learners are frequently used as a starting point or as a compensation strategy, thus it seems appropriate to make use of it in the language classroom to support students in their learning process. Under this premise, we developed online resources for teachers using an English-Spanish contrastive approach. However, our approach does not follow the perspective adopted by the theoretical trend known as *contrastive analysis* (founded by Lado, 1957) that only focuses on those areas where English pronunciation differs from Spanish pronunciation. Our suggestion is to apply a comparison between the realization of the segmental and suprasegmental features of both pronunciation systems in order to invite teachers to reflect on how these features can be taught in Spanish to anglophones.

The course is divided into five sections to support teachers in understanding the importance of learning and teaching pronunciation, identifying the most relevant challenges students might face, formulating realistic goal settings about pronunciation and designing activities that enhance the acquisition of Spanish pronunciation. It also gives a gentle introduction to relevant phonetic and phonological concepts and shows in what ways these are significant for teaching pronunciation.

This initiative intends to encourage teachers of any language to share specialist knowledge with each other and testing educational resources by making use of available online platforms such as OpenLearnCreate: <https://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/>